Perseverance of the Saints

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9).

"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12).

"But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31).

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." (Hebrews 12:1).

Near the end of the Apostle Paul's life, in his second letter to Timothy, he wrote, "I have ***fought the good fight***, I have ***finished the race***, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). These metaphors were very likely familiar to Timothy. It was common in Paul's letters to use metaphors of fighting, running, and other athletic activities to describe the importance of perseverance in the Christian life. When writing to the church at Corinth, he combined these ideas in one statement, saying, "Therefore, I do not ***run like someone running*** aimlessly; I do not ***fight like a boxer*** beating the air" (1 Corinthians 9:26). To correct the churches in Galatia for trying to justify themselves by obeying the Law of God, he wrote, "You were ***running a good race***. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?" (Galatians 5:7). One last example, and many more could be sited, is once again found in the letter Paul wrote to his beloved brother in Christ, Timothy: "Similarly, anyone who ***competes as an athlete*** does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules" (2 Timothy 2:5).

In our ongoing studies on soteriology[1], we've been exploring the Reformed theological perspective on the order of salvation, sometimes referred to as the "ordo salutis"[2]. This current study on the Perseverance of the Saints builds on the previous studies in the series. In all prior studies, a list is provided, often referred to in theology as the "order of salvation." This list serves as a framework within theology, outlining a logical sequence of events through which God applies the benefits of Christ's redemption to His people. It is essential to note that this logical

[1] This refers to the branch of theology that focuses on the nature, means, and effects of salvation.
[2] The Latin term, *ordo salutis*, (Order of Salvation), was in prominent usage during the Protestant Reformation

sequence is viewed from a human perspective. As time-bound individuals, we perceive these truths as a sequential process. The eternal God, who knows the end from the beginning, has no limitations regarding time or sequence! The current study intends to consider the eighth event from our list. For your reference, the complete list of the "order of salvation" is provided below.

1) Election refers to God's choice of people to be saved.
2) The Gospel Call (God calling sinners out of darkness).
3) Regeneration (being born again).
4) Conversion (faith and repentance).
5) Justification (right legal standing).
6) Adoption (membership in God's family).
7) Sanctification (proper conduct of life).
8) **Perseverance (remaining a Christian).**
9) Death - (going to be with Christ) to Glorification.

It is often said that the Christian life is not a 100-meter dash; instead, it is a marathon covering long distances. If you have been in Christ for a while, you well know the truth of this statement! We know from our previous studies and our own experiences that the sin nature remains in a believer after regeneration. We know that there is an enemy of our souls, the devil, who "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Additionally, we understand that "everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:16). We recognize that without God's grace, we could easily fall into the darkest sins! All of these evils, both inside and outside, are stacked against believers!

While the sinful condition described above is true, the wonderful reality for Christians is that they will unquestionably persevere until they reach the glory of heaven! In Reformed Theology, this is called the Perseverance of the Saints. We can define this doctrinal truth simply as those who are genuinely saved (elect in Christ) will, by the grace of God, remain in their faith and ultimately enter heaven's glory.

Some might wonder how I can say this with such confidence. The answer is because the guarantee is based on the sure promise of the Son of God! Jesus spoke these words, "And this is the will of him who sent me, ***that I shall lose none of all those he has given me***, but raise them

up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him ***shall have eternal life***, and I will raise them up at the last day" (John 6:39-40). Notice there is no ambiguity! There is no doubt or question! Those who have been given to the Son of God in election before the foundations of the world[3] will be given eternal life! The promise my Christian friend is ironclad![4]

It is crucial to realize that the order of salvation is like an unbreakable chain. Ask yourself this question: Is it possible for God to elect someone to salvation, call this person to Christ, regenerate, justify, sanctify, and adopt, only for this person ultimately not to inherit eternal life? Loraine Boettner, in his classic work titled *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, states it like this. "This doctrine does not stand alone but is a necessary part of the Calvinistic system of theology. The doctrines of Election and Efficacious Grace logically imply the ***certain salvation*** of those who receive these blessings. If God has chosen men absolutely and unconditionally for eternal life, and if His Spirit effectively applies to them the benefits of redemption, the inevitable conclusion is that these individuals will be saved."[5] No wonder the Apostle Paul could say to the believers in Philippi, "And ***I am sure of this***, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). In a quote attributed to the late R.C. Sproul, speaking on our topic, he writes, "We are able to persevere only because God works within us, within our free wills[6]. And because God is at work in us, we are certain to persevere. The decrees of God concerning election are immutable. They do not change, because He does not change. All whom He justifies He glorifies. None of the elect has ever been lost."[7]

While this confidence should dwell in a believer's heart, it must always be expressed humbly and with gratitude. Sometimes, we hear this phrase spoken casually and flippantly: "once saved,

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[3] See Ephesians 1:3-14. In addition, see *A Study on the Electing Grace of God* essay as part of this current study series. https://reedrusniak.academia.edu/research#papers

[4] This term originally referred to ironclad warships of the 19th century that were nearly impervious to attack. Over time, the term evolved into a metaphor for anything that is extremely strong, unbreakable, or beyond dispute! God's gift of salvation is unbreakable and can NOT be lost. We are saved by grace and carried to heaven by grace! All for the glory, praise, and honor of our great God and Savior.

[5] Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932), 182

[6] Let the reader understand. Sproul clearly taught the bondage our wills are under because of sin. When he cites "free will," he believes man is free to do what his nature dictates. It is by grace alone that the Christian perseveres in Christ.

[7] "Christian Perseverance Quotes (R.C. Sproul)," What Christians Want To Know, accessed June 26, 2025, https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/25-awesome-perseverance-quotes/

always saved." The Christian who has been born again by the power and work of the Holy Spirit, repented of their sin, and believed in the Savior, is the last person ever to say flippantly those words! Yes, the Christian rejoices in their assurance and says a hearty Amen to the Apostle Paul's words to Timothy. "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen (2 Timothy 4:18). Eternity is written in the Christian's heart, and they hold that as a pearl of great price! A.W. Tozer, the wonderful Christian author from the 20th century, once wrote, "Compromise will take the pressure off. Satan will not bother a man who has quit fighting. But the cost of quitting will be a life of peaceful stagnation. We sons of eternity cannot afford such a thing."[8] While the Christian loves the Savior, there is a certain reverence[9] held for God that would prevent them from flippantly saying, "once saved always saved."

In John Murray's classic work *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, he begins his chapter on our topic by answering the question of what the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints does NOT mean. Murray does this because, historically, this doctrine has been abused, misunderstood, and inadequately taught in many areas of the Christian Church. His first observation is that the perseverance of the saints does not mean that everyone who professes faith in Christ is eternally secure. This is a sobering reality that should lead us to examine ourselves and see if we are truly in the faith.[10] Murray writes, "The Scripture itself, therefore, leads us to the conclusion that it is possible to have very uplifting, ennobling, reforming, and exhilarating experiences of the power and truth of the gospel, to come into such close contact with the supernatural forces which are operative in God's kingdom of grace that these forces produce effects in us which to human observation are hardly distinguishable from those produced by God's regenerating and sanctifying grace and yet be not partakers of Christ and heirs of eternal life."[11]

This truth brings to mind the Lord's words in the Parable of the Sower. The explanation of the parable that Jesus gives us helps us understand that outward appearance is not the final judge!

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[8] A.W. Tozer, *The Quotable Tozer* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2018) 120
[9] See essay titled "*A Study of the Fear of God*" https://reedrusniak.academia.edu/research#papers
[10] See 2 Corinthians 13:5 and 2 Peter 1:10-11.
[11] John Murray, *Redemption Accomplish and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 153

"The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown" (Mark 4:14-20).

Dear reader, if you are trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, press on in your faith and desire to grow in Him. Be part of a Bible preaching church fellowship. Attend all public gatherings. Read Scripture each day and sincerely pray for the Holy Spirit to help you obey God. If you are involved in known sin, ask God to give you grace to repent. You are in the race of your life! Remember, it is a marathon! By God's grace, it is the ***one who endures to the end that will be saved***![12] That battle to be holy is a lifelong fight for the Christian! A.W. Tozer, the beloved Christian author from the 20th century, once wrote, "Wherever the holiness of God confronts unholiness, there is conflict. This conflict arises from the irreconcilable natures of holiness and sin."[13] Christian, until you view the joys of knowing and walking with Christ as more precious than the "pleasures of sin for a season[14]", progress in perseverance will be very hard. May God stamp eternity on all our hearts and minds!

We find many examples in the Word of God of people who began strong but ultimately turned away from God. If you have been a believer for a while, you will probably recognize the truth of that statement. You may even have someone dear to you who is in a state of decline. If they are, pray earnestly that the Lord will restore them. Love them and seek to help them. If that person belongs to Jesus Christ, they will return! The sheep always hears the voice of the Shepherd and will come back to him!

The Apostle Paul speaks of "Hymenaeus and Alexander, who shipwrecked their faith and were handed over to Satan[15] to be taught not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20). Then there is a man named Demas. Perhaps he was like the one in the parable quoted above in which "the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things made him fall"? "For Demas, in ***love with***

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[12] See Matthew 10:22
[13] Tozer, *The Quotable Tozer*, 157
[14] Hebrews 10:25
[15] The phrase "handed over to Satan" is perhaps a reference to church discipline. The intent of church discipline is **always to restore** a person to the Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the saints!

this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:10). The Lord Jesus said that "if you ***continue*** in my Word, then you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31). Murray writes, "The crucial test of true faith is endurance to the end, abiding in Christ, and continuance in his word."[16]

One of the most sobering teachings in the gospels is the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23. He says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" These seem to be people who trusted in themselves and the works that they did. The saints who are in Christ persevere in faith and repentance, trusting not in themselves but in their Savior, who gave His life to make payment for their sins.

Sometimes, we hear the term "eternal security" used in relation to our topic. Although it is accurate to say that a person in union with Jesus Christ is secure for all eternity, the term "perseverance of the saints" is much more appropriate. The reason is that it emphasizes the importance of ongoing, or progressive sanctification in the Christian life.[17] Yes, we are wholly saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but we are saved for a purpose. The Apostle Paul tells us what that is! "For we are his workmanship, ***created in Christ Jesus for good works***, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). This is why the Apostle James wrote, "But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). Our perseverance, indeed, our Christian life, should show itself in an abundance of "good works."[18]

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[16] Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied,* 152

[17] See a study comparing between definitive and progressive sanctification. This study is titled "*A Study on Sanctification."* This is also found at https://reedrusniak.academia.edu/research#papers

[18] The term good works can include any task worked on for the glory of God. These can be just about anything if your heart desires to honor Christ. Perhaps a father seeking to lead his family in God's Holy Word. Or maybe a wife and mother building a warm and godly home full of love. Praying, witnessing for Christ, visiting the sick and elderly, faithful giving to the work of the church and many, many more tasks can be considered "good works." It is the heart God desires regardless of if the work is considered "big" or "small"!

Besides the fact that NOT everyone who claims to have faith in Christ is necessarily eternally secure, Murray also emphasizes that the perseverance of the saints does not mean a person is secure in Christ regardless of how they live their life. This may seem obvious from what has been written earlier, but sadly, modern evangelicalism (at least within the last fifty to 100 years) has introduced a person called the "carnal Christian." The term generally is understood to mean someone calls themself a believer in Jesus Christ, but their sinful nature still dominates their life. The word carnal comes from the Greek word *sarkinos,*[19] meaning fleshly or of the flesh. The term "carnal Christian" stems from a misinterpretation of the Apostle Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. In it he writes, "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

In the context of the letter, the apostle is rebuking the church at Corinth for having divisions. He was NOT creating a class of people called "carnal Christians."[20] He wished for God's people to repent of their sins and seek unity in the church. His rebuke was directed at the immature and childlike behavior they had demonstrated. All of his letters remind the believers of their sanctified status in Christ. Throughout all of the New Testament letters, whether written by Paul or others, we consistently see them instructing Christians about the need to turn away from sin. All Christians were, and are, expected to become more like the Savior. While a faithful Christian may experience times when they act according to their fleshly desires, genuine faith always leads to spiritual growth and maturity. Lorraine Boettner's comment is very helpful. He writes, "The doctrine of Perseverance does not mean that Christians do not temporarily fall the victims of sin, for alas, this is all too common. Even the best of men backslide temporarily. But they are never completely defeated; for God, by the exercise of His grace on their hearts

[19] σαρκίνοις is used in the 1 Corinthians 3:1 passage. Has the meaning "to men of the flesh."
[20] In the Scofield Reference Bible, edited by C.I. Scofield and first published in 1909, one of Scofield's notes highlights three "types" of Christians. They are described as "natural," "spiritual," and "**carnal**." These misleading and inaccurate comments have caused harm to many souls! Those who are born again through the work of the Holy Spirit are new creatures in Christ. If you are living in unrepentant sin and are comfortable in it, you should examine your faith before God and His Word. This does NOT mean that believers cannot temporarily fall away. However, those who do so and are truly in Christ will, by the grace of God, return to the Shepherd of their souls.

infallibly prevents even the weakest saint from final apostasy."[21] Because of the love and grace of God, He will not allow His elect people to be abandoned. Many have professed faith in Christ but then fallen away and no longer sought after the Lord. Sadly, in this case, we must question whether they were ever converted.

The Westminster Confession of Faith provides the following definition of perseverance of the saints. "Those whom God has accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but ***shall certainly persevere*** therein to the end, and be eternally saved."[22] We see from this statement how the writers of the confession closely linked perseverance with other works of God in the order of salvation. It is no wonder they explicitly stated the Christian will "certainly persevere." Eternal life for the believer in Jesus Christ is an inheritance! The Apostle Peter, in his first letter to believers scattered across the ancient world, encouraged them with the truth of their heavenly inheritance. Right after his opening greeting, Peter wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ***to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,*** who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5). Can there be any better news? God is keeping the believer's inheritance in heaven! It is safe and secure! You who the power and grace of God has saved, do you see the great salvation God has given to you? Dear Christian, "rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say rejoice!"[23] "Let those who seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee; Let those who love Thy salvation say continually The Lord be magnified" (Psalm 40:16).

Dear non-Christian reader, examine the Word of God and see if these things I have written are true. A wise and godly man once wrote, "The human heart has a thirst for God. God created us, and something in us relates to something in God. Until these two are brought together, which happens at salvation, there is restlessness within the human heart that can never be stilled."[24] Examine the life of Christ as it is revealed in the Gospel accounts. Come to him with a contrite and humble heart and ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart! If you are tired and weary of your sin

[21] Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination,187
[22] Chapter 17, Section I of the Westminster Confession of Faith
[23] Philippians 4:4
[24] A.W. Tozer, *The Quotable Tozer*, 306

and guilt, this message is for you! Christ Jesus is the friend of sinners. Hear the voice of the Savior. “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:27-30).

Am I a Soldier of the Cross?

Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His name?

Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace?
To help me on to God?

Sure, I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord;
I’ll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.

Thy saints in all this glorious war
Shall conquer, though they die;
They see the triumph from afar,
By faith’s discerning eye.

When that illustrious day shall rise,
And all Thy armies shine
In robes of victory through the skies,
The glory shall be Thine.

Author – Issac Watts, 1709